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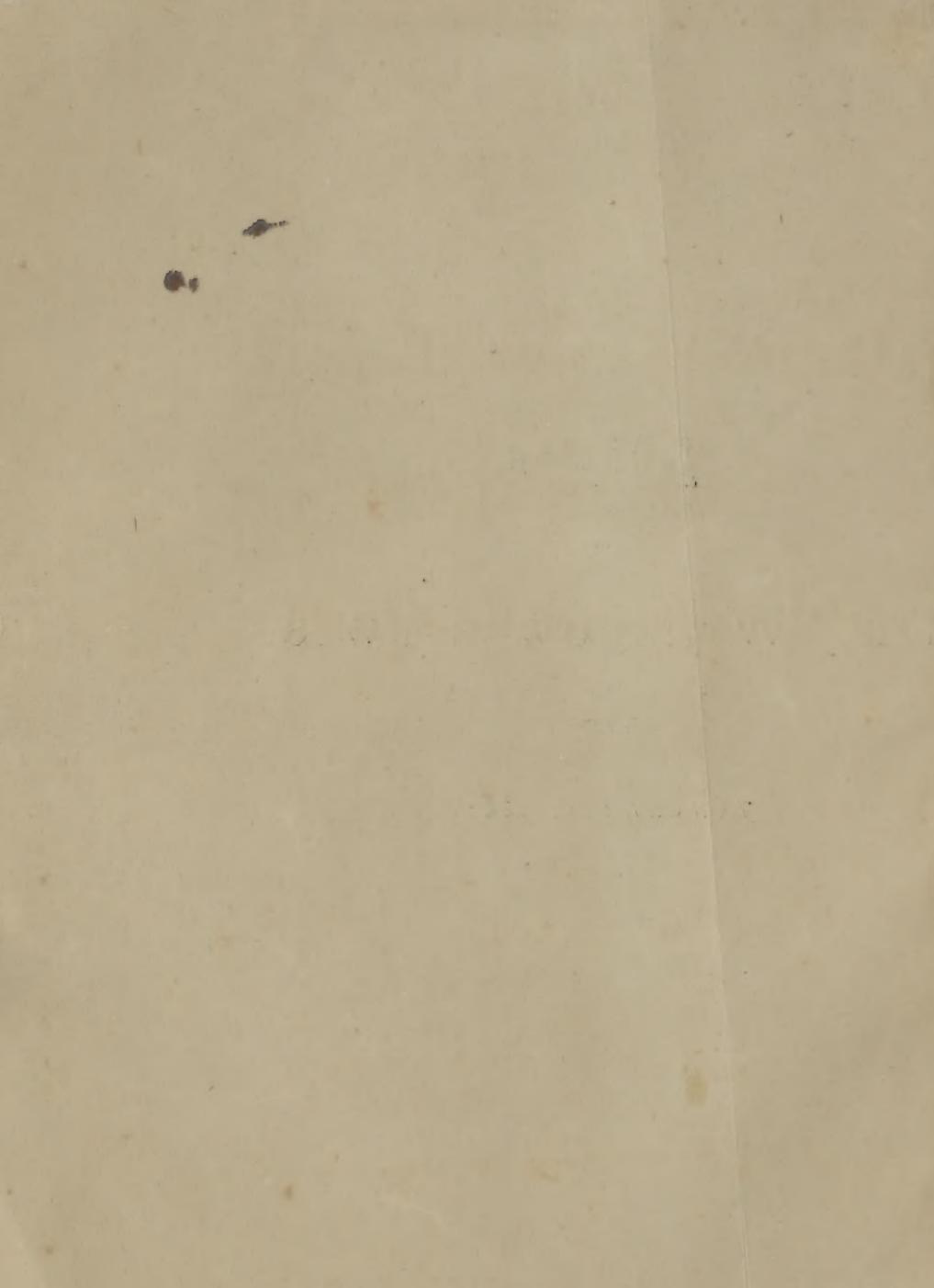
Address

—OF—

DR. WINSLOW LEWIS.



JANUARY 5, 1865.



Address
OF
DR. WINSLOW LEWIS,

ON RESIGNING THE PRESIDENCY OF THE

Boston Numismatic Society,

JANUARY 5, 1865.

John Galt's Office
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1866.

ADDRESS.

Gentlemen—*Brother Members of our Society*:

Although the weak state of my health during the past year would have been a sufficient excuse for my declining to do more, on the present occasion, than make a very few remarks on the state of our Society, many reasons, and chief amongst them, the desire felt by me for its increased prosperity and progress in a *sound* and *legitimate direction*, disincline me to avail myself of that excuse, or to shrink from the performance of any duty so long as I retain any power of performing it.

Probably to the minds of some of my younger brethren, the Horatian warning may present itself:

*“Solve senescentem mature sanus equum, ne
Pecet ad extremum ridendus et ilia ducat.”*

I am by no means insensible of the force and value of that warning; on the contrary it is, I assure you, with very much of diffidence and hesitation that I enter on my task of throwing out some suggestions for the guidance of those whose powers are so much fresher and more vigorous than my own, yet on the other hand, it will not, I trust, appear a prompt-

ing of presumption, if I acknowledge the consciousness of feeling, that what loss of vigor may have been produced by advancing years, has been, to some extent, compensated by experience, especially in those studies and pursuits which have formed the chief relaxation and delight of my later years; and while, neither in dignity, nor sweetly-flowing eloquence, nor indeed in age itself, can I or would I compare myself to that aged monarch of the *Iliad*, the “eloquent orator of the Pylians,” yet this advantage does, I believe, accrue from years, that younger and more impetuous brethren, will, at least, accept kindly and listen considerately to the words of their more aged Brother and Friend.

It is my duty firstly, to make a very brief statement concerning what we, as a Numismatic Society, have accomplished up to this time, and what has been done by others in the United States, whether as individuals or associates.

Our Association dates from 1860, when a few individuals, who had for a considerable time been interested in the subject, united in the formation of the “Boston Numismatic Society.” Their object was, by an associated zeal, to improve themselves in the very interesting pursuit of a study which might not only increase their own knowledge of coins and medals, but enable them to diffuse such information as might be valuable to others engaged in such pursuits elsewhere. The Society have met since that period regularly once a month, generally on the first Thursday. I need not say that these meetings have been very pleasant in their social aspect and full of interest. Rare and valuable coins have been exhibited at every meeting, and papers read of great value to the Numismatic inquirer, and quite a cabinet has been created, either by donations of the members or by friends of the Society.

The earliest collector among our number is Mr. William G. Stearns, of Cambridge, the present Steward of Harvard University. He was the first gentleman who devoted himself to the formation of a somewhat extended cabinet of coins and medals. The next are Mr. Colburn and Mr. Davenport, gentlemen of great information as Numismatists, and who have done much towards the advancement of the science and of our Society. There are also several of our members whose collections are large and very choice.

Of Mr. Appleton's collection we can safely say that it is second to none in this country, except, perhaps, that of Mr. Mickley. Mr. Appleton's takes a wider range, embracing, as it does, numerous specimens of every country. His collection of ancient Greek and Roman coins is quite large, and contains fine specimens of great rarity. His American Series contains very many of the rarest of our coins and medals, in particular the Massachusetts Pine Tree Copper of 1776, the only specimen known, and also the New England III'd of 1652, which was unknown to collectors except through its mention by Folkes, until the discovery of the specimen in the Cabinet of the College at New Haven. Mr. Appleton's is the only other known.

Mr. Seavey's contains a complete series of the gold coinage of the United States Mint, consisting of fine specimens of every date and variety ever coined. His collection of pattern pieces is complete.

Judge Putnam's Series of American coins is full and very fine. His English Series contains many rare and valuable pieces.

The collection of medals by Mr. Wheeler is probably the largest in this country, principally from the French Mint.

Mr. Fowles' collection of Greek coins and foreign medals is quite extensive and valuable.

The collection of Papal medals belonging to your President is thought to be the most complete in this country.

There are now kindred Associations in Philadelphia, Providence, and New York. The principal authors in this country on Numismatics are Eckfelt and DuBois, Hickcox, Prime, Snowden, Felt, Dickeson, and Bushnell. The first Mint Master appointed on this continent was John Hull, and the first building for the manufacture of coin was in this city. It was ordered to be made of wood, to be 16 feet square and 10 feet high, and certainly, as Felt observes, it did not deserve the rebuke of an adage common to that day, "Twelve pence laid out on the purse, and only sixpence in it."

As an Association we have endeavored to publicly caution collectors against the unjustifiable practice, now too palpably resorted to, of issuing fac-similes of rare coins and medals. Of the Funeral Gold Medal of Washington, we are cognizant at least of two struck recently in New York, and we know, also, that the rare half cent of 1796, which has brought \$96, has been imitated and the counterfeit circulated.

So much, gentlemen, for our own "*res gestæ*" and position thus far; and now I shall proceed to consider, as concisely as I can, those points of the history, science, and uses of Numismatics, which seem to me more particularly worthy of our careful consideration, if we desire and hope—as assuredly we all alike do—to raise this Society of ours to that position of dignity, prosperity, and power, of which I believe it to be, if properly conducted, eminently worthy.

The Science of Numismatics treats both of coined money and of medals, and the nature, devices and execution of the different denominations of coins, their reciprocal relations, and the laws regulating them. As "*money*,"

—*coined money*, or gold, I mean,—occupies so powerful and prominent a place in our affairs in our daily life just now, that almost the first thing looked for in the evening paper is the price of gold, a few words as to the origin of “*money*” may not be altogether out of place. As to the precise time at which the precious metals first came into use as a circulating medium, nothing can now be clearly ascertained, except that it must have been at a period of great antiquity, (as to *paper substitutes*, we know much more, but in this, as in other things, *increased knowledge* is not a synonym for increased *happiness*). The earliest purchase of land on record, I believe, is thus related: “And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money of the merchant.” (Gen., xxiii, 16.) The use of bullion, whether of gold or silver, was a vast improvement on the old practice of bartering cattle, which existed in the *heroic ages*: but it was still attended with serious inconvenience especially in regard to the tedious process of *weighing* and *assaying*. It was to obviate this inconvenience, that gold and silver were eventually *coined*—that is, marked with a stamp, which attested both the *quality* and *quantity*, or value of the piece of metal; and then, finally, as a protection against the frauds which private persons might be led to commit, the coining of money was made an exclusive privilege of the government.

In Persia, gold was coined at a very early period, as is proved by the very early mention of the *Darics*, or sovereigns, which were so called from being stamped with the portrait of the Darius or king, then reigning. We also know that “*sovereigns*,” to use the English term, of a similar kind were circulated by the Macedonians, under the name of *Philippi*, as having been first made in the reign of Philip II., father of Alexander the Great.

In those ancient gold coins, the proportion of *alloy* is much smaller than that which the gold coins and trinkets of the present day contain. Then this proportion was only about one *fiftieth*, whereas now it is never less than one *twelfth*. There are few, even of partly savage nations now, that have not a coinage of their own. The number of coins and medals, of which specimens are extant, is upwards of 200,000 ; and it is only a natural consequence, that so vast and long a train of metallic documents should show no little light on history : and this is the main value of our science, though not, I grant, the only one. This the Numismatic student should always bear carefully in mind, as he should also the *mode* in which coins illustrate history. This mode is chiefly *confirmatory* and *corroborative*, especially as to chronology, at least as regards the more ancient coins. On this point I will cite a brief extract from the able article on Numismatics in the Encyclopædia Britannica, an article doubtless familiar to most of you, and whose perusal I would strongly urge upon all who are interested in the subject. “ The value of the *corroborative* evidence afforded by coins must not be overlooked. It chiefly relates to chronology, although it also adds to our knowledge of the pedigree of royal houses. But perhaps the most interesting manner in which coins and medals illustrate history, is in their bearing contemporary, or nearly contemporary, portraits of the most famous kings and captains, from the time of the first successors of Alexander the Great to the present age ; whereas pictures do not afford portraits in any number before the later period of the middle ages ; and works of sculpture, although occupying in this respect the same place as coins in the last mentioned and under the Roman empire, are neither so numerous nor so authentic. There is no more delightful companion in historical reading than a cabinet of coins and medals : when we know the features of Alex-

ander, Mithridates, of Julius Cæsar and Augustus, of the Antonines and Severus, we can more readily take ourselves back to the times in which they lived, and see a real interest in their stories. Our belief in the truth of history is confirmed by the qualities we can perceive in their portraits. The strength and energy of Alexander, the brilliant genius of Mithridates, the philosophic calmness of Antoninus, the obstinate ferocity of Nero, and the brutality of Caracalla, are as plain on their coins as in the pages of history. The numismatic portraits of the time following the founding of Constantinople, have less *individuality*, but after the revival of art, they recover that quality and maintain it to our day, although executed in a very different style from those of antiquity. From this last class we can form a series of portraits more complete, and not less interesting, than that of the ancient period."

Nor is it upon *history* alone that our science throws this illuminating and illustrating light. It is to the same source that we are, in no small degree, indebted for our knowledge of the *religious ideas* or belief of the ancients, particularly the Greeks, in regard to whose mythology the more ancient coins afford us very valuable evidence.

The same remark applies to *Geography*, in which most important information as to *position* of towns, their *inhabitants*, *trade*, &c., has been acquired almost entirely from coins. That noble art also, of which coin-engraving is itself the child—*Sculpture*—is illustrated in an eminent degree by this our science, not only in the preservation of the memory of lost statues, but also in the very high degree of engraving or sculpture art-excellence exhibited on many of the ancient coins themselves.

From these very brief remarks, in which I have glanced at the "*summa fastigia rerum*,"—"the chief heads of a story," it is plain that many, if not

most, departments of Ancient Literature must be indebted for their illustration to Numismatic Science. History, Geography, Mythology, Art, Poetry, must all gratefully acknowledge this obligation. If you wish any further evidence of this, let me refer you to those valuable Dictionaries by Dr. Smith of London, which have proved such valuable auxiliaries to classical and antiquarian students during the last twenty years, more particularly in the first three subjects named, and the last,—the Dictionaries of Antiquities, of Mythology, and of Geography,—and as to Poetry, let me further refer you to the beautifully illustrated editions of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, &c., that have emanated during about the same period from the Oxford and Cambridge University presses, and have generally appeared, soon afterwards, on the tables of our fellow-citizens, Little, Brown & Co. A vast number of the illustrations in each and all of these cases, have been taken, you will find, from *coins* or medallions.

I find something that I desire to say further in regard to the *uses* of this science, and the *mode* in which it ought to be, and indeed can *alone* be, advantageously and legitimately pursued, so well and fully expressed in another passage in the article previously cited from, that I fear I cannot do better than give its words in preference to my own :

“ It cannot, however, be said that the *actual condition* of the science justifies great expectations. We shall best perceive this if we enquire what *objects* it has to fulfill. Besides its bearing upon the History, the Religion, the Manners, and the Arts of the nations which have used money, the science of Numismatics has, *from its relation to Art*, a special modern use. Not only do coins display the various styles of art prevalent at different ages, but, in doing so, they supply us with abundant *means* for *promoting* the advancement of Art among ourselves. If the study of many schools be

at all times of advantage, it is especially so when there is little originality in the world. Coins and medals have, therefore, two main uses; the one relating to the illustration of history, and the other to the promotion of Art. It is not," (I ask *your special attention*, brethren, to *this* part of the passage, as embodying precisely the same suggestion and warning I would earnestly seek to impress upon our younger members,—nay, rather upon all Numismatic students, for we are all too apt to fall into the same error), "it is *not* for *these* purposes the collections are usually founded. It is in vain to point to high prices now paid for rare coins, if *that rarity be not always accompanied by some marked historical or artistic importance*. Surely we must fear the decadence of this science, if its votaries, leaving its important teachings and objects, are seen to lavish wealth in the almost worthless pursuit of making collections, the possession of which will not engender a valuable idea, nor add one iota to our knowledge. Are we not somewhat degenerate at this present time, in our Numismatic pursuits? Will the possession of fifty or sixty cents, from their first coinage to this year, a series not certainly strikingly artistic nor elegantly suggestive, be called a *lofty pursuit*? Let us hope for better days in this respect; and meantime let us preserve all that is historically valuable, and do all we can to discourage the folly of collecting worthless pieces of metal, whose sole value is in their scarcity, and on which so much time and money have been expended during the last several years."—"Prime," *Coins, Medals, and Seals, Preface*.

"Very few among the collectors think of anything beyond the rarity or beauty of a coin, and of the latter they frequently judge by a vicious standard. So little have the coins themselves been thoroughly studied, even by professed Numismatists, that few of them have formed an opinion as to the different denominations to which many of the most common specimens

correspond. The study of ancient *coins*, and that of ancient *systems of coinage*, have been more and more separated. There is also much reason to complain of the comparative neglect of various branches of Numismatics. Until equal attention be paid to all, the condition of the science cannot be called sound. Why, for instance, while the Roman money is eagerly collected and studied, is the Byzantine series, its proper continuation, and one of the most important portions of the mediæval class, generally treated with contemptuous neglect?

“ Numismatics, thus superficially and partially pursued, demands the least labor, and affords no result of importance, except the negative one of bringing into disrepute one of the most valuable aids to historical inquiry.”

If any feeble word of mind could add even a feather’s weight to the force of the above remarks, I would most emphatically commend them to your careful consideration, and especially in regard to these points:—1st, Let not mere *variety* lead away the collector of coins, but let him ever have a special regard to their *historical* or *artistic* values; 2d, Let each young Numismatist endeavor to gain a fair knowledge of the *principles* of the science, before he enter upon the *practice* of it, and this he can readily obtain in such works as those of Humphreys, Akerman, Hawkins, and the more recondite productions of Mionnet, Spanheim, Bizot, and others, and also in the article from which I have made two quotations; 3d. Let him avoid every temptation to a mere partial, one-sided study of some one *corner*, but let him aim, both for his own sake and for the honor of the science to which he professes his devotion, at a scholarly and catholic, that is *thorough* study of the whole *field*. Thus will he be helping, *pro virile parte*, to remove from our science the stigma too justly attached to it by the British Encyclopedist.

I feel I have only entered on the threshold of what I desired to say to you on many topics, and yet that I have already trespassed too far upon your time and attention; to *one* topic that has dwelt much on my mind of late, however, I must and will (with your permission) briefly allude.

In the illustrations of Ancient History, to which reference has been made, we find numerous coins representing many of the great battles and illustrious conquerors of antiquity. America this day is living and acting a greater, grander, and more terrible and tremendous war-history, than ever was enacted by ancient Persia, Greece, or Rome. Both amongst our dead and living leaders of armies are men who well deserve to rank with the Alexanders, the Cæsars, the Scipios, of those olden times; would it not then be a most just and graceful tribute to the heroic and patriotic valor and skill of these our brave fellow-countrymen, to commemorate, by a *series of medals*, some of the more illustrious scenes of the war, as well as the more prominent actors in them? Would it not also give a stimulus to an art which, it is feared, has fallen into a state of languor and decay?

